

# Firing the salvo...

Come to think of it, why hasn't India ever produced thriller novels in English? We have all the raw materials—a 60 year vintage enemy, very secret services, brave soldiers, several theatres of war and a substantial literate reading audience—yet this genre seems to be plodding into prominence only in the past few years.

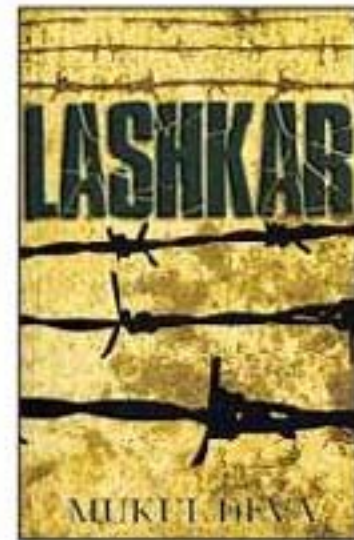
First, there was Shashi Warriar with his *Night of the Krait* and subsequent novels about the Special Operations Force. Aniruddha Bahal also made a foray into this genre with his *Bunker 13*, a well-written novel. And now we have Mukul Deva. Unlike the other two novelists, Deva is an ex-military man, having served in the Sikh Light Infantry for 15 years. So does that make a difference? Well, not quite.

*Lashkar* starts off with a rather bloody scene—it is 29 October 2005 and a bomb detonates in the crowded Sarojini Nagar market in Delhi

killing a plump, middle-aged lady and "...spraying the pretty teenaged girl standing directly behind her with gore and flesh". This bomb sets in motion a chain of events where the ultra-secret Force 22 Secret Service is called into service and takes the fight across the border deep into enemy territory pursuing members of the Lashkar-e-Toiba.

The book has some well written sections, one of which is when the terrorists are moving around placing bombs in buses in Delhi. It does scare one as to how easily someone can blow up innocent civilians. But there is something incomplete about the book. The plot lacks the tautness of a thriller novel a la the masters of thriller writing.

The most important character is Iqbal whose transition from a jihadi to a killer of jihadis is predictable and hardly evokes sympathy. None of the other characters have been sketched out thoroughly.



Lashkar  
Mukul Deva  
HarperCollins,  
2008, pp 365,  
Rs 195.

Another aspect of a thriller novel is the excessive amount writers dedicate to detailing out and describing gizmos and strategies. Deva is rather subdued when it comes to this aspect but his caveat is that he does not want to reveal too much so that this information is not misused. Fair enough but he could have been more creative and made up some things—after all, it is fiction. Even the abrupt ending makes you wonder what happened.

Deva needs to be congratulated for being part of the pioneering group in the genre of the Indian thriller novel but I'm sure someone very soon will do a lot better than *Lashkar*.